

All Faiths Calendar

Selected observances
from September
through November

September 21—28

Sukkot (Judaism) Tishri 15–22, 5763

Sukkot, also called "The Festival of Booths" or "Feast of the Tabernacle," is a seven-day holiday that begins five days after Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The festival recalls God's provision for the Jews during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, and is a general celebration of the abundance of autumn. To celebrate the holiday, many Jews build a *sukkah*, a temporary house that is constructed of natural materials and has at least three sides. The ceiling of the *sukkah* should remain partially open so the stars are visible through it at night. It can be decorated with the fruits of the fall harvest, such as gourds, fruits and leaves. Many Jews eat their meals in the *sukkah*, and some sleep and study there as well. Sukkot is considered a "season of joy," a holiday that emphasizes thanksgiving and interaction with nature.

Recommended Reading:

For a basic understanding of the holiday, try Ronald Isaacs's *Every Person's Guide to Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah*. (Jason Aaronson, 2001) For a pan-holiday approach, there's Richard Bank's *Everything Judaism: A Complete Primer to the Jewish Faith—From Holidays and Rituals to Traditions and Culture*. (Adams Media, Oct.)

September 23

Mabon (Neo-Paganism)

Occurring on the day of the autumn equinox, when day and night are of equal length, Mabon is a traditional pagan harvest festival. In premodern Europe, Mabon thanksgiving festivals lasted several days, as revelers tasted the libations that resulted from the grape harvest (it's no coincidence that Mabon is traditionally associated with the

god Dionysus, who taught humans to make wine). In modern neo-pagan celebrations, Mabon is considered to be a "Lesser Sabbat," and practitioners are encouraged to remember others (e.g., by making donations to a food bank or volunteering their time at an animal shelter) as they give thanks for the abundance in their lives. In 1998, the International Pagan Pride Project began holding public celebrations on Mabon, to simultaneously celebrate the autumn equinox and ameliorate poverty by holding food and clothing drives. Thousands of people now participate in the project in towns and cities across America.

Recommended Reading:

The most comprehensive guide to the holiday is Kristin Madden's *Mabon: Celebrating the Autumn Equinox*, which traces the history of Mabon, its associations with various deities, and its connections to fall harvest festivals throughout the world. (Llewellyn, July)

October 31—November 1

Halloween/All Saints' Day (Neo-Paganism and Christianity)

Christian and pagan traditions both mark October 31 as a special day. Halloween has its roots in an ancient Celtic harvest festival that honored the spirits of those who had died the previous year. Christianity co-opted the festival, designating November 1 as a day to remember the Saints (all of the "hallowed"). This day is known as All Saints' Day, and the night before it is All Hallow's Eve, or Halloween. Halloween still incorporates elements of the ancient festival of the dead, including witches, ghosts, goblins, and ghouls. The tradition of donning costumes on Halloween seems to have arisen from a belief that the living must be disguised to fool the malevolent spirits who were at large on Halloween. American Halloween traditions gained importance with Irish immigration in the mid- to late 19th century. In Ireland, Halloween is still a national holiday.

Recommended Reading:

This autumn brings a very strong Halloween book, Nicholas Rogers's *Halloween: From Pagan Ritual to Party Night*. (Oxford, Oct. 31) It is the best work so far on the increasingly important holiday. Also, David J. Skal's *Death Makes a Holiday: A Cultural History of Halloween* is a more popular, sensationalist version of much of the same history. (Bloomsbury, Oct. 2)

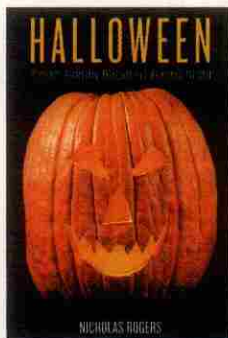
November 6

Ramadan (Islam)

During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims fast each day from daybreak until sundown, often arising before dawn to have a meal. After this is consumed, no food or drink will pass their lips until after sundown, when they will break the fast with a ritual meal of dates and water before consuming their regular evening repast. The Ramadan fast is one of the "five pillars" of Islam and is mandatory for all adult Muslims who are not infirm, pregnant or nursing. Those who are exempt are expected to make up the fasting days after Ramadan is over, as circumstances permit. A Ramadan fast is a spiritual exercise designed to turn hearts toward Allah and away from earthly concerns—as the Qur'an states, it is prescribed so that followers will acquire self-restraint. (Al-Qur'an 2:183) At the close of the month, the fast is broken on Eid al-Fitr (December 6 this year), which is a major holiday in Islam. In America, many Muslims take Eid al-Fitr as a holiday from school and work, and the day is the occasion of much feasting and gift-giving. In 2001, the U.S. post office issued a stamp to commemorate Eid al-Fitr, the first inclusion of Islam among the holiday stamps.

Recommended Reading:

Photographer Peter Sanders collects extraordinary images in his *In the Shade of the Tree: A Photographic Journey Through the Muslim World*, which depicts daily Muslim life in nations such as Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Turkey. (Starlatch, Aug.) In John Esposito's *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions, from One of America's Leading Experts*, Esposito presents a question-and-answer primer on Islam that has a brief section on holy days. (Oxford, Nov.) ■



New looks at neo-pagan festivals from Oxford and Llewellyn.

